the MAGICIAN

By Dianne Bates

Illustrated By
Gaston Vanzet

First published 1988 by
RIGBY EDUCATION
22 Salmon Street, Port Melbourne, Victoria 3207, Australia
and
SHORTLAND PUBLICATIONS
360 Dominion Road, Mt Eden, Auckland, New Zealand
Reprinted 1990
© copyright 1988
© copyright text Dianne Bates 1988
ISBN 0 7312 0274 0

Project Manager: Andrea Butler
Consultants: Jan Turbill, Stephanie Wade
Managing Editor: Kate Lovett

Design and Assembly: Engine Room
Typesetting: AdverType
Printed in Singapore by Saik Wah Press

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

JULIA KINSKY SCHOOL LIBRARY

the MAGICIAN

By Dianne Bates
Illustrated By Gaston Vanzet

"How'd you do it?" I asked. "You know, the trick with the tie."

I was sitting in the dressing room after the show watching Uncle Rob. He was looking in the mirror as he wiped make-up off his face.

"You know a magician should never let anyone know how a good trick works, Red," he said, blobbing cold cream on to his cheeks.

"Yes, but . . ." I began.

He looked at me. "No," he said, "you're not ready for it yet."

Uncle Rob had been teaching me tricks ever since I could remember, but I'd never seen this one before.

During the show he'd called for a volunteer from the audience. A man with an awful pink and purple tie dangling over his stomach had come up.

"That's a wonderful tie," Uncle Rob had said. Then taking the end of the tie, he'd cut about seven centimetres off with a pair of scissors. The audience had screamed with laughter at the look on the man's face. Uncle Rob had cut another piece off the tie. Then a third piece near the knot. Then he'd snipped another segment off the neck-piece. By that time the tubby man was red with fury.

"Hey, that's my best tie," he'd roared.

But Uncle Rob hadn't listened. He'd put the pieces in a paper bag and blown the bag up. Then he'd popped it with a loud "bang", and out had fallen the man's tie, all in one piece. It was a terrific trick and the audience had clapped and whistled for ages.

"If I could learn that trick and finish my act in the talent quest with it," I said, "I'd be the winner."

"You just practise what I've taught you so far," Uncle Rob said.

I don't think he knew just how much it meant to me to win that quest. There was a ten-dollar prize which would buy a lot of magic equipment. I wanted to be a real magician when I grew up.

Having an uncle who's a magician is the best thing that ever happened to me. Uncle Rob had already taught me so many things. Not just tricks, but how to present an act; how to make an audience laugh. I felt pretty sure that the act I'd put together for the talent quest was good, but that tie trick would clinch it for me.

I tried at home for days but just couldn't work the trick out. In the end I decided on something else.

I asked Chalky Harris to help. Chalky's all right. He's the school clown. Not my best friend but a guy you can trust to keep a secret. Besides, I figured, if I did use my best friend, or even a good friend, the other kids would guess.

"What you've got to do, Chalky," I said, "is to volunteer for this act. I'll give you one of my old ties. Wear it to school for a few days before the show – so no one will suspect. I'll explain to the audience what should happen, BUT when I pop the bag, all the pieces will fall out . . ."

"And I'll pretend to get real mad and say what a fool you are and storm out." Chalky had the idea, and he was just right for the part.

"That's it," I said. "They'll be killing themselves laughing at the end of the act. That's the way to leave your audience. Happy."

It seemed like a good idea. In fact, I got carried away with the idea of winning. I started dropping hints around the school about how terrific my act was. Better than anyone else's, I boasted.

That's how the trouble started.

Harry Bevan (''Hotshot Harry'' we called him behind his back) fancied himself as a singer – a punk rocker. He was in the quest. When he heard about how I'd been bragging that I was going to win, he thought he'd do something about it.

I was standing in the playground eating an ice-block when they came up behind me – Harry's gang. Rooster Robinson, Chick McCoy, Tiger Jefferson and Hotshot himself.

''Heard you think you're going to win,'' said Hotshot.

''Win?'' A lump of ice caught in my throat.

''Come on, you know what we're talking about,'' Chick said, putting his face right up to mine.

ZIPPY
ICE IS NICE
ZIPPY
ICE IS NICE
ZIPPY
ICE IS NICE

"Oh, the talent quest!" I said, playing dumb. I hoped my face looked calmer than my stomach felt.

"We don't like the idea of pipsqueaks like you acting so smart, see." Hotshot poked at my chest – hard so it hurt.

"We want to know what sort of tricks you are going to do," said Tiger. He was chewing gum and looking real mean.

"Well some card tricks. You know, making them disappear and some tricks with string. A balancing egg trick. Then a tie trick. That's something different."

"Oh yeah?" said Rooster. "How do you mean?"

And I told them. Not what I was going to do, but how Uncle Rob's trick was done. Only I said I was going to *do* it. I don't know why I said it. It was just one of those stupid things you say when you're trying to act brave.

"Don't believe you," Rooster said.

"It's true."

"Aw, come on."

"Like to see you do it."

"Are you boys going to stand there arguing all day? Didn't you hear the bell?"

We all jumped. Old Jamesy, the Deputy Principal, was leaning out of the staff-room window.

"No sir," we chorused.

"Get a move on," he said. We did.

"Me and my big mouth!" I thought that to myself over and over all day. I kept getting angry at myself for lying. What's worse was that everyone in the school kept asking me about it. Chalky too.

"Hey, Red, did you really find out how to do it?"

"No."

"But they're all saying . . ."

"I know what they're all saying. But it's not true." I told him what had happened.

"Boy," he said, "I wouldn't like to be in your shoes."

I didn't know what to do. I thought about trying to get out of going to school the day of the concert. But my mother had made me a proper tuxedo to wear for the act, and had put a deposit on a top hat at the costume shop. She wouldn't let me miss it for anything.

I couldn't ask for Uncle Rob's help. He was away at a magicians' meeting and I didn't know when he'd be back. Besides, I don't know that I could have dared to ask for his help after what I'd done. I hung around Billy Carson who'd just got over the chicken pox, trying to catch the bug from him. Nothing happened. I couldn't even get myself sick – only when there was something really good on, like when I had mumps just before camp last summer and couldn't go.

In the end I decided there was no way out of it, I'd just have to go ahead as planned with Chalky. But instead of laughing the kids would hiss and boo because they were expecting something better. There was nothing else I could do.

Then it was the day of the talent quest. All the kids who were to perform were running around backstage like ants in a nest that's been trodden on.

"Where's my lipstick?"

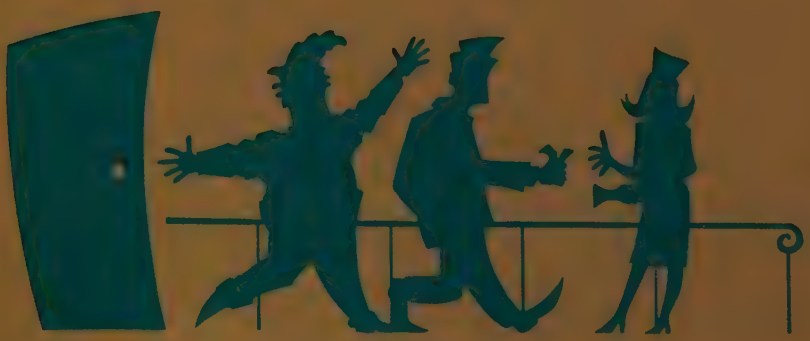
"Who's taken my wings?"

"Miss Excell, I forgot to bring my music."

"I can't remember my lines."

I'd been ready for ages and was squatting on the stage, peeping out from behind the curtains. The hall was crammed with kids. And parents. Sitting right there in the front row was my mother smiling as if it was her birthday. She was in for a shock. They were all in for a shock. Except Chalky. I could see him sitting in an aisle seat wearing my bright red tie. I never did like that tie.

Just then I saw Uncle Rob. He was walking into the hall with Old Jamesy. They were laughing and talking away together as if they'd known each other all their lives. Uncle Rob! I felt sick. Really sick. A hundred snakes slithered around my stomach.



"Ready for the show, smart guy?"

I turned. Hotshot Harry stood there, looking terrific but terrible. His dyed orange hair was spiked up with gel. Safety pins were stuck all over his shirt. It was open to the waist and he had scribbled hairs on his chest with eyebrow pencil.

I was just about to make some smart remark about his hairy chest when Miss Excell, who was running the show, came up to organize us. I was second last and Hotshot was on after me.

It was nerve-racking waiting backstage all that time. We weren't allowed to talk and we couldn't see what was going on. At long last it was my turn.

"Ladies and jellyspoons, curls and joys," I began. That got a laugh. "You are privileged this afternoon to watch one of the most dazzling acts of magic ever seen in this country. First I shall take these cards . . ."

The card tricks that I'd practised for hours went over well. The Four Robbers . . . The Ace Trick . . . The Push-through Mystery. After each one the audience clapped. My mother's face beamed with pride.

Then something went wrong in the egg-balancing trick. In this trick you tell the audience no one is able to spin an egg but you. It's really very easy. You must use a fresh raw egg for a volunteer to spin, and a hard-boiled one for yourself. The fresh one won't spin, but the hard-boiled one will.

Skinny Alcock was the volunteer. Up on stage he clowned around, bowing to the audience and making wisecracks. I spun my egg but of course he couldn't spin his. He grabbed both eggs and pretended he was a juggler.

"Stop it," I hissed. Both eggs fell to the floor.

"Hey, one's hard and the other's soft," Skinny yelled, picking up the gooey mess and letting it run through his fingers. "What a cheat!"

"Now you know eggs-actly how the trick works," I said, thinking fast, "but I won't be eggs-plaining anything else to you."

The audience liked that but it had made them restless. I started the string tricks, but the string tangled. Although I'd done it a million times before, the cut-and-restored twine trick didn't work out. The audience groaned.

"What about your tie trick, Useless?" Rooster Robinson yelled from the audience.

It didn't help that he was sent to the office straight away because the other kids started a slow handclap. The teachers jumped up and walked around the hall. Soon it was deadly quiet.

"Here goes," I thought.

"For this trick, I need a volunteer. Someone who's wearing a tie."

Almost as soon as I said the words, Old Jamesy jumped to his feet. "I'll volunteer," he said.

I nearly died! This was the last thing I'd expected. I looked at Chalky. He shrugged his shoulders at me and seemed as surprised as I was.

Jamesy was standing up there on stage, facing me. I couldn't speak. What should I do? Get them to close the curtains? Tell the audience it was a joke? I wished I was dead.

"Now, Red," Jamesy was saying to me and the audience, "the idea is you cut my tie into pieces and then you restore it, right?" I nodded dumbly. Still I couldn't talk.

"Well, here are the scissors. Are you ready to cut it?"

All I could see was swirls. Red and yellow swirls – Jamesy's tie.

"Cut it then," he said.

"I can't," I whispered.

"Cut it," he ordered loudly. I cut it.

"Cut it again." I cut it again.

It was suddenly silent in the hall. Jamesy took the pieces in his hand and bundled them into the bag on the table.

"Blow up the bag," he ordered. Again I obeyed.

I blew and blew. Then stopped. I looked at the audience. My mother was smiling. Chalky was white. Tiger Jefferson and Chick McCoy were sitting very still, staring at me. I felt like crying.

"Burst it," Jamesy said.

The next moment passed as if everything moved in slow motion. I held the inflated bag in my left hand, then brought my right fist over it sharply.

The bag exploded with a loud "pop!" I jumped. This was it. Jamesy bent over in front of me. I was just about to make a run for it when suddenly the audience was cheering and clapping wildly. There was Jamesy in front of me holding his tie up above his head. Not just pieces, but the whole tie!

Never in my entire life was I ever so amazed as at that moment. I just stood there like a dummy. Shocked.

"I've done it," I said to myself. Then aloud, "I've done it!"

Jamesy turned to me, grinning. His mouth stretched from one ear to the other.

"Guess we magicians should take our bows, eh son?" he said.

JULIA KIRINSKI SCHOOL LIBRARY

JULIA KIMBERLY SCHOOL LIBRARY

P9-BXT-264